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Social Skills as a Determinant of the Adaptability of Students with Hearing Impairment in a University Setting

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Abstract
This study examined the influence of social skills on the adaptation of students with hearing impairment (HI) in a university setting. Students with HI often face adaptation and social adjustment challenges, which can negatively affect their academic performance. The study population comprised 50 students with HI at the University of Calabar, drawn from both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the Department of Special Education. Purposive and census sampling techniques were adopted for the study. Given the small population, the census sampling technique was used to include all students with HI in the study area. A questionnaire was used for data collection to measure how the exhibition of social skills by learners with HI determines their adaptability to the university learning environment. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for the data analysis. Results showed a positive correlation (0.92) between the exhibition of social skills by learners with HI and their adaptability to the university learning environment. If learners with HI are assisted to develop social skills, this will enhance their adaptability to the learning environment and their overall academic performance.

Keywords: Adaptation, Adjustment, Environment, Impairment, Social.

Introduction

The ear is one of the vital sensory organs that enables human beings to hear, adapt, and adjust to their environments. Through the ear, humans perceive, learn from, and respond to what goes on in their immediate environments. When the organ of hearing is impaired, the problem affects all areas of life, including learning. Various studies have shown that the academic performance of students with hearing impairment is often due to a complex interplay of many factors. When someone cannot hear clearly or at all, significant psycho-social and language problems may develop, as hearing provides a platform and a sense of security and participation in life. Because of their condition, many learners with hearing impairment struggle to build relationships, express themselves, and relate to their peers, especially in school. The inability to do so usually results in low self-esteem, which in turn inhibits their academic performance. Hearing-impaired persons differ from hearing persons due to characteristics such as hearing loss and sign language use. They are also prone to discrimination because of delayed language development and difficulty communicating with hearing people, making them a vulnerable group (Irino et al., 2024; Li & Yang, 2018; Ma et al., 2022).

Ajayi & Azanor (2021) opined that students with special needs are liable to low self-confidence, loss of self-esteem, high frustration levels, anxiety, depression, and despair. Self-esteem positively correlates with both temperament and behavior, while self-consciousness and shyness (e.g., feelings of discomfort in social situations) originate from negative self-views based on fear of disapproval by society (Lazarus, 2014). Society often regards good academic performance as evidence of scholarly achievement; children with hearing impairment therefore find it difficult to measure up to this societal standard.

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Various studies (for instance, Batten, Oakes & Tim, 2014; Ajayi & Azanor, 2021; Abid, Hifsa & Zabar, 2019) indicate that children with hearing impairment can have marked social difficulties compared with their hearing peers. Factors that influence these social interactions need to be reviewed to inform interventions. Existing and indigenous literature have shown that students with hearing impairment are found to be below their hearing counterparts in the area of academics, and their poor academic performance most times is traced to lack of communication, paying little or no attention to other factors Ajayi & Azanor, 2021).

Every individual must be ready to face and compete with the challenges of life according to age, gender, and disability due to cultural change and different incidents in life. Persons with disabilities may be preparing themselves in order to cope with social changes, difficulties, and the development of social interactions. As a result, training is given to special students by different psychologists and counselors in various schools. To address emotional problems and social challenges, psychologists have been involved in social skills education in the whole world and in educational institutions, based on the suggestions of WHO & UNICEF (WHO, 2003). Social skills are, no doubt, the capacities that construct positive and valuable behavior, and these abilities powerfully influence individuals to play out their social responsibilities and ability to handle routine activities (Abid, Hifsa & Zabar, 2019). Social skills also assist in the maintenance of relationships without causing tension to oneself or teasing others. Indeed, even for normal children, it is hard to adapt to the complex circumstances and decision-making in everyday social life, not to mention persons with hearing impairment.

According to Weiss (2013), there is evidence indicating that children with HI who are engaged in linguistic interaction with their parents are functioning well socially, emotionally, and cognitively. The parents of such children with hearing impairment may have meaningful linguistic interaction with their children at a variety of levels through signing or other communication skills. As a result, these children get better chances to gain rich experiences of life. They can acquire knowledge of self and others, and so they feel themselves as a part of this world. Even hearing parents of children with HI can learn sign language and other appropriate communication methods through which they can bring positive change in the academic, social, and cognitive life of such children. But lack of such interactions raises the risk of these children not being able to develop their full potential.

Ming & Sansan (2025) adopted a qualitative research approach to evaluate the current situation and influencing factors of social adaptation of hearing-impaired middle school students. The thematic analysis method was used to examine the social adaptation of hearing-impaired middle school students in order to provide empirical evidence for efficiently improving their social adaptation ability. The results indicated that the current situation of social adaptation among hearing-impaired middle school students is that overall career adaptation ability is relatively low, interpersonal adaptation ability needs improvement, and self-regulation ability needs to be enhanced. The main influencing factors were identified as learning methods, learning initiative, expectation level, communication skills, and the support of important others. The new findings of this study are as follows: the middle school students with hearing impairment have diverse ways of emotional regulation and have good emotional regulation effects; the junior middle school students with hearing impairment have their own unique understanding of 'friends', and may have already regarded 'character' as the foundation and core of 'friends'. The study was, however, not directed to measure the academic performance of the learners with HI as a function of their social skills.

In a study by Ajayi and Azanor (2021), they investigated factors such as self-esteem, family connectedness, and social skills as determinants of the academic performance of students with hearing impairment in Ibadan, Oyo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research. A total of fifty-two (52) students with hearing impairment were selected through simple random sampling. Technique for the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select three integrated schools in Ibadan. Four instruments were validated and used to collect relevant data. Three research questions were raised to guide the study. Data collected were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that there was a positive multiple correlation ($R = 0.572$) among self-esteem, social skills deficits, and family connectedness on academic performance. All these factors, in this order of magnitude: family connectedness ($r = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$); self-esteem ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.05$); and social skills deficits ($r = 0.138$, $p < 0.05$) predicted academic performance of students with hearing impairment. They recommended that school counselors should provide direct service to parents, classroom teachers, the school community, and students with hearing impairment on the roles these factors play in the academic performance of students with hearing impairment. The study was, however, not emphatic on the effect of social skills in the school environment on the adaptability and academic performance of learners with hearing impairment.

In a related study, Abid, Hifsa & Zabar (2019) attempted to explore the presence of social skills among hearing-impaired students receiving education from government special education schools and to compare different levels of social skills based on different demographic variables. It was a descriptive study in nature, and a survey method was used to collect the data from the population of hearing-impaired children living in division Faisalabad and Lahore, with a sample size of 200 hearing-impaired students. Responses on social skills were taken from mothers as mothers have better knowledge of the proficiencies of their hearing-impaired children's social skills. Children's

age group was 05-20 years. The age range of mothers was 25-55 years. The social skills checklist was used as a tool of the study for collection of data. They adopted a mixed-method approach, and statistical measures were made via frequency distribution, t-test, and ANOVA. Results of the study showed that 82% of hearing-impaired students have a low level of social skills, and 18% of hearing-impaired students have the best level of social skills. The study also found that there is a significant difference in the social skills of students based on living area and children's age, and there is no significant difference in the presence of social skills in hearing-impaired students based on the mother's working status (housewife and job holder) and mother's education level. The outcome of the study also demonstrated that there was a positive correlation between the presence of social skills in hearing-impaired students and their age. The study gap in the study is that it did not evaluate how social skills directly affect the academic performance and adaptability of learners with HI in the school environment.

Batten, Oakes & Tim (2014) conducted a study on factors associated with social interactions between deaf children and their hearing peers. They surveyed five (5) key databases and three (3) specialized journals and identified fourteen (14) papers that met the inclusion criteria. The methodological quality of the articles was assessed using an adapted checklist. There was a general lack of consensus across studies. The main factors investigated were the deaf child's communication competency, age, and level of mainstreaming, which overall were positively associated with peer interactions. The study also found that females were more likely to have positive social interactions. The majority of the studies were cross-sectional. Some of the studies lacked appropriate control groups and did not recruit an appropriate range of informants. A wide range of factors were found to be associated with social interactions between deaf and hearing children. The role of communication gained the highest consensus across studies. Other factors were also identified to be involved in more complex interactions.

Bushra & Abdul (2014) also conducted a study to explore the levels of adaptive emotional abilities among adolescents with hearing impairment and to identify the roles of socio-demographic variables in the development of these abilities. In the study, an indigenous instrument, the Adaptive Emotional Abilities Scale, was developed based on the Emotional Ability Model proposed by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2002). A comparative sample of 1050 hearing adolescents was also recruited. The scale was administered to 469 randomly selected adolescents with hearing impairment and 1050 hearing participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years. The instrument was found to have acceptable validity and reliability. The Proportion Consensus Method was used for scoring, in line with Barchard & Russel (2006). Results showed that hearing participants scored significantly higher on the Adaptive Emotional Ability Scale than adolescents with hearing impairment. On the other hand, sociodemographic variables, such as access to hearing assessment and speech services, time of intervention, presence of a hearing-impaired family member, family preferred language, and participants' preferred language, regardless of their hearing loss, were found to play important roles in developing the adaptive emotional abilities of adolescents with hearing impairment. The results clearly indicated that hearing impairment itself is not the only reason for the poor performance of adolescents with hearing impairment. However, the scale was not directly used to measure the academic performance of learners with hearing impairment. Another major limitation of the study was the lack of inclusion of parents of adolescents with HI, due to a lack of standardised tools, time, and financial constraints.

In a related study, Tahereh, Nikta, Enayatollah & Farnaz (2013) examined the effect of social skills training on the perceived competence of female adolescents with deafness. The study was conducted in special school settings to determine the effects of social skills training on the perceived competence of female adolescents with deafness. The study used a pre-post quasi-experimental design. Sixty-nine female students with deafness enrolled in four different special secondary schools in Tehran, Iran, between 2010 and 2011 participated in this research. The study included an intervention group and a control group. Two of the four secondary schools were randomly allocated to the intervention group (33 students), and the other two to the control group (36 students). Participants were between 11 and 21 years old (Mean = 15.43; SD = 1.89), and more than three-fourths of each group (i.e., 28 students in each group) had profound hearing impairment. The intervention group participated in twelve bi-weekly sessions. Pre-test and post-test data were collected using the 'Hearing Impaired Children Self-Image Test'. The questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire asked students about their feelings toward their competence in the cognitive, physical, socioemotional, and communication domains, as well as their school adjustment. We analysed the data using SPSS software, version 16. The results showed that the intervention group had significantly higher total perceived competence scores than the control group ($P < 0.001$), as well as higher scores in three domains of socio-emotional competence ($P = 0.003$), communication competence ($P < 0.001$), and school adjustment ($P = 0.018$). The study concluded that learning social skills in adolescents with deafness is likely to improve their sense of competence and emotional well-being.

Statement of the Problem

The major problem this study seeks to investigate into is the difficulty in adapting to the university environment by students with hearing impairment. People with hearing impairment (especially adults) often struggle to socially

adjust to the society they live in. This is more worrisome in the university environment where teaching, learning, and research take place. Given the characteristics of the university system, where rules and regulations, tone, and climate provided may not be at par with those of persons with hearing impairment, there is a need that they must adjust to the environment to function effectively.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

i. To identify the variables that contribute to the social adjustment of students with hearing impairment in the university environment.
ii. To measure how the exhibition of social skills by students with hearing impairment determines their adaptability to the university learning environment.
iii. To measure whether the involvement of students with hearing impairment in extracurricular/social activities has negative or positive effects on their learning outcomes.

Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated to determine how social skills influence the adaptation of students with hearing impairment (HI) in a university setting. The questions are:

i. What are the variables that contribute to the social adjustment of students with hearing impairment in the university environment?
ii. How does the exhibition of social skills by students with hearing impairment determine their adaptability to the university learning environment?
iii. Is there any relationship between the extent of involvement of students with hearing impairment in extracurricular/social activities and their learning outcomes?

Hypotheses

Three research hypotheses were formulated to determine how social skills influence the adaptation of students with hearing impairment (HI) in a university setting. The hypotheses are:

i. There are no specific variables that contribute to the social adjustment of students with hearing impairment in the university environment.
ii. The exhibition of social skills by students with hearing impairment does not determine their adaptability to the university learning environment.
iii. There is no relationship between the extent of involvement of students with hearing impairment in extracurricular/social activities and their learning outcomes.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design. It is a survey research design because the events and actions being considered have already occurred, and the researcher cannot change the nature of the variables because their effects have already occurred.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of 50 students with hearing impairment in the University of Calabar, drawn from the students doing both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the Department of Special Education. Purposive and Census sampling techniques were adopted for the study. The census sampling technique was used to select all students with HI in the study area due to the small population.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was used as the major instrument to elicit responses on how the exhibition of social skills by learners with hearing impairment determines their adaptability to the university learning environment. Some learners were also interviewed to buttress their responses to the questionnaire. The instrument was validated by two research experts in test, measurement, and evaluation at the University of Calabar.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was used for data collection to measure how the exhibition of social skills by learners with hearing impairment determines their adaptability to the university learning environment. The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of each of the fifty (50) students interviewed was obtained from the Departmental Examination Officer. This was used to measure whether the involvement of the students with hearing impairment in extracurricular/social activities has negative or positive effects on their learning outcomes. The number of extracurricular activities involved in by each learner with HI was used as the independent variable, while the CGPA of each of the learners was used as the dependent variable.

Data Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for the data analysis and to jointly measure hypotheses II and III. Table one shows the various extracurricular/social activities in the institution and the number of learners with hearing impairment involved.

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Table 1: Extra Curricular/Social Activities Involved in by Learners with HI

S/N	EXTRA CURRICULAR/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF LEARNERS WITH HI INVOLVED
1	Athletics	9
2	Students Union Government	4
3	Departmental/Faculty Association Representation	8
4	Course Representatives	3
5	Study Groups	15
6	Campus Social Clubs	11
TOTAL		50

The information in Table 1 is represented in the bar chart in Figure 1.

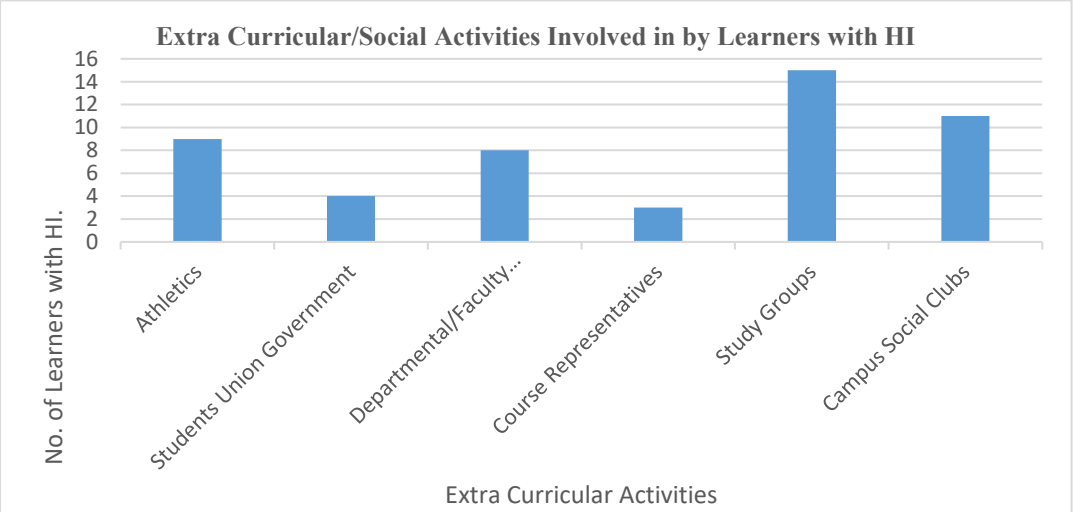


Figure 1: Bar Chart showing Extra Curricular/Social Activities Involved in by Learners with HI

Results

The data collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The CGPA of each student with HI was used to ascertain if it was dependent on their involvement in extracurricular/social activities. Table 2 shows the number of extracurricular activities of each of the students sampled and their corresponding learning outcomes measured by their CGPAs.

Table 2: Extracurricular Activities vs CGPA of Students with HI

S/N	No. OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (x)	CGPA (y)
1	4	4.88
2	3	4.13
3	5	4.67
4	2	3.12
5	1	2.17
6	3	3.99
7	2	3.97
8	4	3.87
9	5	4.45

Table 2 continued

S/N	No. OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (x)	CGPA (y)
11	1	1.98
12	3	3.87
13	4	3.89
14	5	4.67

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15	2	2.98
16	1	2.16
17	3	2.78
18	2	2.45
19	3	4.11
20	1	1.34
21	4	3.92
22	2	2.65
23	4	4.12
24	5	4.67
25	1	2.34
26	2	2.87
27	1	1.76
28	1	2.18
29	3	3.12
30	4	4.73
31	4	4.65
32	5	4.78
33	3	3.41
34	2	2.67
35	2	2.41
36	1	2.32
37	3	3.47
38	4	4.77
39	5	4.98
40	2	2.55
41	3	3.74
42	4	4.78
43	4	4.55
44	3	3.35
45	2	2.51
46	1	2.41
47	3	3.51
48	2	2.51
49	3	3.31
50	4	3.55

Using the formula for Pearson's Product Moment Correlation:

$$r = \frac{\sum(x-\bar{x})(y-\bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x-\bar{x})^2 \sum(y-\bar{y})^2}}$$

Where x = number of extra-curricular activities, while y = the CGPA of students.

Table 3 shows the computation of the correlation coefficient r.

ITEM	VALUE
$\sum(x-\bar{x})(y-\bar{y})$	58770021
$\sum(x-\bar{x})^2$	982043

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$\sum(y-\bar{y})^2$	1406994
$\sqrt{\sum(x-\bar{x})^2\sum(y-\bar{y})^2}$	1175469.322

r = 0.92

The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) obtained from the analysis of the data in Table 2 yielded a value of 0.92, indicating a strong positive correlation between social skills and the adaptability of learners with Hearing Impairment (HI) to the university learning environment.

Discussion

The implication of the result is that socialization plays a key role in adaptation and academic performance of learners with hearing impairment. This aligns with the views of several researchers (Ming & Sansan, 2025; Ajayi & Azanor, 2021; Abid, Hifsa & Zabar, 2019; Tahereh, Nikta Hatamizadeh & Enayatollah, 2013; Bushra & Abdul, 2014, etc.) who conducted related studies to determine the relationship between social skills, adaptability, and academic performance of learners with hearing impairment. The results also align with the views of Igbo, Nwaka, Mbagwu & Mezieobi (2016), who opined that persons with hearing impairment, especially adults, have difficulty in social adjustment in learning environments and society at large. Similarly, the findings of this study are in line with the views of Asher and Weeks (2012), who stated that the difficulty of the deaf or individuals with hearing impairment to communicate with others and to be communicated with makes it difficult for them to be integrated into both the school environment and society at large.

Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that when learners with hearing impairment involve themselves in extracurricular/social activities such as athletics, student union government, departmental/faculty associations, course representation, study groups, and campus social clubs, such activities aid them in adapting to their learning environments and also positively influence their academic performance.

Recommendations

The paper offered the following recommendations based on the challenges identified:

1. It is recommended that adaptive socio-psychological skills and extra-curricular activities should be incorporated to complement the existing curricula of learners with HI. This will go a long way in assisting in their adaptation to their learning environments and will ultimately influence their academic performance.

2. The researchers also recommend that a diverse range of stakeholders such as educators, specialists, community members, researchers, and educational institutions should collaborate to implement holistic approaches that address the complex socialization challenges faced by persons with hearing impairment in society. Moreover, early intervention and support, promotion of social inclusion, raising awareness, and encouraging social support for persons with hearing impairment can promote their social adjustment.

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